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ABSTRACT

In 1996, Central Florida Community College (CFCC) participated in the American Association of Community Colleges' Exploring America's Communities project, which works to strengthen the teaching and learning of American history, literature, and culture at U.S. community colleges. CFCC's principal goals were to promote conversation among faculty about American identity and to assist in carrying these discussions into the classroom. The primary mechanism for implementing the program was a series of faculty "brown bag" round table discussions, which addressed issues regarding immigration to America, American identity, and textbooks. The program's other main accomplishments were: an Interdepartmental Discussion Session, where a speaker addressed the entire faculty, challenging the college to encourage the college to continue to grapple with the question of American identity; a film series, including two movies about Mexican-Americans and Native Americans; the creation of two new courses introducing multicultural education; and curriculum revisions for two humanities courses, which were expanded to include identity and diversity issues. The only obstacle the program faced was that a plan for a nationally recognized key-note speaker was not implemented due to a lack of funds. Future events include several speakers, discussions, and art and literary exhibitions. (HAA)

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Central Florida Community College
Exploring America's Communities
Progress Report

In: National Conference on American Pluralism and Identity Program Book
(New Orleans, LA, January 18-19, 1997)

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I. CENTRAL FLORIDA COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Central Florida Community College was established in 1958 and now serves about 6,000 credit students with approximately 30,000 involved in non-credit programs. Our three campuses in the tri-county area of Marion, Levy, and Citrus counties serve a largely rural population of approximately 332,000. Our main campus is in Ocala (selected the fifth best place to live in the U.S. by Money Magazine in 1995). In addition to three campuses, CFCC boasts several venues offering cultural events as well as instruction: the CFCC Exhibit Center hosts traveling exhibitions and lectures; the Brick City Center for the Arts is a focal point for visual and performing artists; and the Appleton Museum of Art (jointly owned with Florida State University), a large art museum with an extensive collection of western and non-western art.

II. GOALS OF THE PROJECT

Our principal goals were to promote conversation among CFCC faculty about American identity and to assist in carrying these discussions into the classroom. The primary mechanism was a series of faculty "brown bag" round table discussions.

III. ACCOMPLISHMENTS

A. Brown Bag Discussion Series

The faculty "Brown Bag" sessions proved a great success. At the first session, Humanities Instructor John Mathews offered a historical sketch of 19th- and 20th-century immigration to America. Adjunct History Instructor Darrell Riley discussed varying conceptions of American identity over the past two centuries. Finally, Education Instructor Jana Bernhardt presented examples of how history textbooks have changed in the past century.

Ocala campus:

3001 S.W. College Rd., Ocala, FL 34474
(352) 237-2111 FAX (352) 237-0510

Levy County campus:

1015 N. Young Boulevard, Chiefland, FL 32626
(352) 493-9533

Citrus County campus:

3800 S. Lecanto Hwy., Lecanto, FL 34461-9026
(352) 746-6721 FAX (352) 746-5581

At the second session, Communications Instructor Debra Vazquez outlined America's rich literary heritage and pointed up the fact that not only is there a multitude of talented Asian-, African- and Latino-American authors currently working in this country, but that there has been for centuries. Also, by having those present read several short works, she demonstrated that questions of pluralism and identity are profoundly expressed by these authors.

In the third session, Humanities Instructor Ron Cooper used audio recordings to show that the presence of similar musical structures within American vernacular styles illustrates the borrowing among poor, rural musicians and songwriters of varying ethnicity. Communications Instructor Joe Zimmerman used D. W. Griffith's The Birth of A Nation to exemplify how American film, even from one of our most gifted filmmakers, has perpetuated racial stereotypes.

The series drew fifteen to twenty faculty members to each session, and each was video taped for viewing and discussion on our other campuses. One luncheon was attended by CFCC's new president during his first week on campus.

B. Interdepartmental Discussion Session

In another key segment of our faculty development element of the project, Dr. Daniel Rivas of Saddleback College addressed the entire faculty and challenged the college to continue to grapple with questions surrounding American identity in all disciplines. After his address, Dr. Rivas joined the members of the Humanities & Social Sciences and Communications & Fine Arts Divisions for a prolonged discussion.

C. Film Series

This year's CFCC Film Series included My Family (1995), about several generations of a Mexican-American family's successful struggle to survive in Anglo-American dominated society, and Powwow Highway (1988), about the picaresque exploits of a young Native American and his white companion. Both films were followed by discussions led by CFCC faculty members.

D. New Courses

Two new courses were created. "Introduction to Multicultural Education" will be a prerequisite for admission to the educational departments at Florida's nine state universities. Topics include exploring American commonalities as well as appreciating our differences. The second new course, "Introduction to Children's Literature," includes an examination of American identity in a multicultural society.

E. Curriculum Revision

Two courses were revised by the addition of new materials. HUM 2450: American Humanities took "Search for Identity: Common Ground Within Diversity" as a guiding theme of the class. Students collaborated to produce a mural that will adorn a wall of the Student Lounge on the CFCC Citrus Campus. In addition, Diane Ravitch's The American Reader, a multicultural anthology, was added to the required reading for American Humanities. Also, Patricia Osborne's Finding America: The American Experience in Multicultural Literature is being considered for use in AML 2022: Survey of American Literature II.

IV. OBSTACLES

Our plan for a key-note speaker of national recognition to address the entire faculty was not implemented due to a lack of funds.

V. FUTURE EVENTS/REMAINING GOALS

In the spring of 1997, two series of events connected with the project will take place on campus: "Florida's Literary Heritage" will be a series of appearances and discussions by Florida writers, including Lola Haskins (poet and historian of 19th-century Florida women), Roberto Fernández (author of humorous and insightful novels of Cuban-Floridians) and Stetson Kennedy (pioneering folklorist and author of several books about the KKK and other hate groups).

In April there will be a series of lectures and panel discussions devoted to the theme "Intolerance and Understanding." These will complement the traveling exhibition "Anne

Frank in the World" at the CFCC Exhibit Center.

VI. RESPONSES OF STUDENTS AND COLLEAGUES

There was no clear widely-accepted sense of what it means to be an American, other than our perception of ourselves as Americans. If anything, there was a feeling of E Pluribus, Pluribus, but we're still Americans, nevertheless.

The question of what divides us was easier to answer. The most frequent responses were color, class, ignorance of each other and fear.

Regarding what we have in common, students and faculty alike emphasized our shared political institutions (the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution), our economic institution of free-market capitalism tempered with government regulation, and our cultural institutions (with far more emphasis on the popular arts and mass media than on the fine arts and literature).

What brings us together? Most mentioned was the belief that despite the differences, we were still Americans. As one student said, "With all our differences, we're still an 'us'!"